Welcome to the Ethics Committee

SCRIPT FOR ACTORS

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Phase One

1

Darkness. A voice from the darkness speaks. It is the voice of Fifthist, speaking in a different timbre and accent than she normally does.

FIFTHIST: Do you feel a void in your life? Everyone does, whether they know it or not. Think about it. You can feel it inside you right now: a heavy emptiness in the middle of your chest. It's a reflection of the one in your existence, like particles in quantum entanglement. Do you remember how we talked about quantum entanglement? Nod "yes". Yes, you do. Yes, you feel the emptiness.

This is good. It's a blank slot waiting for you to fill it up with your deepest desire until your deepest desire is pushing up into your throat. You will gag on your need. And until you do, it is a resonation space, for you to build your will like organ music in a cathedral. Hear the music now. This is not a metaphor. If your will is strong enough, there will be music now. Remember now that nothing in this book is a metaphor.

2

A bare interview room. Newbie is alone, pacing the floor. Fifthist enters.

FIFTHIST: Hello, I'm told you've had some complaints.

NEWBIE: Are you with the FBI? Why are you still holding me here? I've been interviewed twice and nobody tells me anything. I just want to get home.

FIFTHIST: Yes. Well. We want to be absolutely sure we've got all the details correct.

NEWBIE: That's what they said the last time.

FIFTHIST: We won't need to interview you again, I promise you that. Now, tell me in as much detail as you can remember: how did you become involved in the recent production of *The Hanged King's Tragedy*?

NEWBIE: I'm a student at the University. I joined the theatre society as a favour to my friend Dave. On the tenth of March, there was a meeting of the society, and we decided to put on *The Hanged King's Tragedy*. It was... It was Dave's idea. He wanted to play Gonzago.

Pause. Newbie is upset.

FIFTHIST: What was your role in the production?

NEWBIE: I was the stage manager. I attended rehearsals and took notes on props, set, costumes, scene changes, stuff like that, keeping track of what needed to be done. You took my script, you can see the notes I made.

FIFTHIST: Yes. In fact, I noticed that some of the scenes were cut in the script?

NEWBIE: Yes. In rehearsal, we found that – well, I say "we". It was Dave, really. He was the director. He decided they weren't working.

FIFTHIST: But we've reviewed a video that was made of the performance, and those scenes were performed on the night.

NEWBIE: Yes. Yes, I... but they changed the words. Didn't they? And there was... There was somebody on the stage who wasn't in the cast.

FIFTHIST: Yes. Can you describe this person?

NEWBIE: A... man? I think. With a hood covering his face. Tall. Thin. A white... garment, like a boiler suit. Or a straitjacket.

Fifthist takes out a glossy photograph and shows it to Newbie.

FIFTHIST: Was this the figure you saw?

NEWBIE: Yes! Oh my God… it doesn't look human. It's got two legs, but… oh, Jesus.

FIFTHIST: When this figure came on stage, did you do anything?

NEWBIE: I didn't know what to do. I was running lights, and he – it – whatever it is, it was walking around the stage as if – look, I don't know what you know about stage lights, but if you don't stand in the right spots, nobody in the audience can see you. Everything has to be rehearsed so the actors know where to stand and move, otherwise they end up in shadow most of the time. And he… it… moved around as if it knew exactly where the lights would be. So… at first I thought it was some sort of prank – but then… well, if it was a prank, it seemed like the cast must have been in on it, and the… person must have been told about the lighting plan. So. I didn't do anything.

FIFTHIST: And what about the cast? How did they react to his presence?

NEWBIE: They didn't! I mean... they acted like he'd always been there. That just made me even more convinced that they were in on it. They even changed the words. It wasn't like improv, either, where there's always a bit of adjusting, it was seamless. Totally seamless, as if it had been written that way all along. As if he'd been part of the cast from the start. They called him "the Hanged King". [*Pause*] I went backstage in the interval – just briefly, there wasn't much time. I looked for him – I thought maybe I knew who it was, there's this mate of Dave's who – but there was no sign of him anywhere. I didn't get a chance to speak to the cast.

FIFTHIST: And what happened in the last act?

NEWBIE: You know what happened! You know what happened and I don't want to talk about it! I swear to God, I don't know where the nooses came from! They weren't in the script, I didn't rig them up, and as for that knife –

FIFTHIST: It's not your fault.

NEWBIE: I'm the stage manager. It was my responsibility to make sure all the props were safe to use. But Dave took that knife and he – and they all...

But the audience! They just started killing each other! That really was nothing to do with me.

FIFTHIST: That's what I'm trying to tell you. This isn't the first time this has happened.

NEWBIE: What?

FIFTHIST: Since its publication in 1630, there have been 87 recorded performances of *The Hanged King's Tragedy*. 32 of them have resulted in an event like the one you experienced.

NEWBIE: ...how is that possible? What *was* that thing?

FIFTHIST: We don't know. And we are profoundly disturbed and regretful that we were unable to nip this production in the bud, before anyone got hurt.

NEWBIE: You're – you've done this before.

FIFTHIST: Not me personally, but this organisation, yes.

NEWBIE: Who are you? You're not the FBI.

FIFTHIST: No. We are the SCP Foundation. We monitor events that could be described as "anomalous". Events that defy rational explanation, and pose a danger to the public. We conduct research into anomalous objects, creatures, and sites, and contain them so that they can't do any harm.

NEWBIE: You didn't contain it!

FIFTHIST: We've been keeping track of *The Hanged King's Tragedy* since 1932, buying up and pulping any printed copies we could find. We have bots scanning the internet for traces of the text, and eliminating them. There was going to be a TV adaptation in 1985, did you know that? We shut it down before it was broadcast. The station made a VHS recording of the production; there is only one copy, and it is held in our vaults. We do what we can. But we're not all-powerful. Sometimes what we can do is not quite enough. I'm very sorry.

Pause.

NEWBIE: Dave said the book was a family heirloom. It looked old. I didn't get to work with the original. We worked from photocopies, and the printing looked really... Did you get all the photocopies?

FIFTHIST: Yes.

NEWBIE: And Dave's copy?

FIFTHIST: Yes. The photocopies have been destroyed, and your friend's original is in our

vaults, under lock and key. We're going to step up our vigilance against this phenomenon. We were too late for your friend, but now that another of the original print run has been removed from circulation, well... it lowers the odds of another instance.

NEWBIE: So I didn't do anything wrong? It's not my fault?

FIFTHIST: It's not your fault.

NEWBIE: Thank God.

Pause.

NEWBIE: Can I go home?

FIFTHIST: Ah. That brings me to a difficult matter.

NEWBIE: Difficult? What do you mean?

FIFTHIST: We can't let you back into civilian life.

NEWBIE: Civilian? What are you talking about? If I haven't done anything, why can't you let me go?

FIFTHIST: Our primary concern at the Foundation is to guard the public and prevent anomalous items from causing harm to life or civilisation. In service of that goal, we also strive to keep the existence of anomalies as secret as we possibly can.

NEWBIE: Why?

FIFTHIST: There is a consensus on how the universe works, a consensus built up by the human race over millennia of experience and observation and research. The persistence of that consensus is what allows civilisation to continue. We cannot be civilised in a world haunted by demons. Until we find a way to explain all of the anomalies we are currently containing, we keep them under wraps. In the case of an incident like the one you experienced, that means that all surviving witnesses are dosed with amnestic drugs so that they do not retain any knowledge of the events they went through. We have to do that before we allow them back to their lives.

NEWBIE: Amnestic? Amnestic… Mnesis, meaning memory. A, meaning without.

FIFTHIST: I see you know your Greek.

NEWBIE: I'm studying classics. So you wipe people's minds?

FIFTHIST: Not their *whole* minds. We've been doing this for decades; we have it down to a

science. We can remove a few hours, a day, a week, a year... But we couldn't do anything for you. We couldn't make you forget.

NEWBIE: You mean you drugged me?

FIFTHIST: Tell me honestly, would you rather remember or forget? The nooses falling from the flies, the actors hanging dead, their intestines spilling, the audience falling on each other and ripping each other's flesh --

NEWBIE: Stop!

FIFTHIST: We can't risk you going back to civilian life and still remembering *The Hanged King's Tragedy*. You know the play too well. What if you told somebody about it? What if you recited a few lines, and they managed to track down a copy and put on a new production? The same thing would happen. The same slaughter. No, we cannot allow it.

NEWBIE: You – so what are you going to do? Keep me locked up?

FIFTHIST: We can't let you go back to your old life. You're with us now, until the day you die.

NEWBIE: You can't do that! You can't hold me prisoner. I haven't done anything wrong! You said it yourself – it wasn't my fault!

FIFTHIST: You're not being punished. Think of it as a quarantine. Quarantine of the mind.

NEWBIE: What if I… What if I promise not to tell? Swear on my life? You can catch me again and lock me up if I let anything slip.

FIFTHIST: That would never work. We have no reason to trust you, and it would take more resources to keep watch on you in civilian life than to keep you in our custody.

NEWBIE: So you're going to lock me up? Because I – saw something?

FIFTHIST: We're certainly going to keep you with us. But you don't have to be a prisoner. You could work for us.

NEWBIE: Work? Doing what?

FIFTHIST: Whatever it takes. We need researchers. We need doctors, psychologists, engineers, soldiers – linguists, too. You study the classics – well, you'd be surprised how often we need to translate something into Latin, or out of it. We have a lot of documents from ancient times, and we're constantly discovering new ones. Or if that

doesn't sound appealing, you could be one of our administrators. Handle accounts, payroll, IT, logistics, archives… There is a place for everyone in the Foundation. We have a vast organisation that needs a lot of people to keep it running, and you could help with that.

NEWBIE: Help with *what*?

FIFTHIST: Our mission. The mission of the SCP Foundation.

NEWBIE: Which is what, exactly? Keep secrets and lock people up for learning them?

FIFTHIST: SCP stands for Special Containment Procedures, but it also stands for Secure, Contain, Protect. That is what we do. What we try to do. We are the reason why until yesterday, there had been no live productions of *The Hanged King's Tragedy* since 1964. We watch out for phenomena like that, and stop them before they can do any damage. [*Pause*] You don't have much of a choice, you know. You can spend the rest of your life in a standard humanoid containment unit, sealed from the outside world, or you can join us, and try to make sure that nobody else has to go through what you went through. What your friends went through.

Pause.

FIFTHIST: Those are your options. It's up to you.

3

The Overseer's office. Overseer and Ethics, sitting on opposite sides of a desk. Overseer's chair is bigger and more luxurious than Ethics's. Overseer has a large black leather-bound notebook open in front of him. Ethics has two rubber stamps, and is scrutinizing a series of documents.

ETHICS: [*skimming documents and stamping each one as she finishes*] Approved.

Approved.

Approved.

Approved.

[*A pause, as she spends longer looking over one document than the others.*]

OVERSEER: Is there a problem?

ETHICS: How did you think you would get away with this?

OVERSEER: "Get away with this"? What do you take me for? A naughty schoolboy?

ETHICS: This is a schoolboy trick. Slip the outrageous one underneath a pile of innocuous personnel changes.

OVERSEER: It is not outrageous. It is entirely reasonable.

ETHICS: [*setting down one stamp and picking up the other*] Your concept of "reason" never ceases to astonish me.

OVERSEER: SCP-352 is very powerful indeed. Any means of placating it, keeping it under better control –

ETHICS: You are not feeding human infants to Baba Yaga! I don't care how effective it is. And how did you even find out that SCP-352 – [*reading from document*] "becomes more cooperative on a diet of this nature"?

Pause.

Somebody fed her the flesh of a human child. Are you going to tell me that was an accident?

OVERSEER: The researcher who discovered it maintains that it was. Of course, he may be lying.

ETHICS: I'm going to start an investigation.

OVERSEER: Oh, really? How many investigations does the Ethics Committee have in its

queue at the moment? Is it two hundred and thirty? [*Flips a page in the notebook, nods.*] No, no, my mistake: two hundred and forty-three. Well, you'll get to them all eventually, I dare say.

ETHICS: [*stamping the document*] Denied. And don't try that again.

OVERSEER: The other Overseers tell me over and over again that your Committee serves a vital purpose. And yet, here we have a witch with hair that can swallow whole forests. She can keep a man in a blissful dream even as she eats him alive. And for the sake of a few mewling babies, you want – the Ethics Committee wants to hobble us while we try to control her.

ETHICS: SCP-352 is contained.

OVERSEER: For now.

ETHICS: Then there's no problem, is there? [*Gathering documents into a folder and getting up to go.*] Is that all?

OVERSEER: There is one further document I wish you to peruse. [*Hands over a document.*]

ETHICS: This is an O5 request?

OVERSEER: Yes.

ETHICS: It's not signed. It can't be approved or denied until it's been signed.

OVERSEER: I am not asking you to approve or deny it. I am asking your opinion on whether it would be approved if it had been signed.

ETHICS: It would be denied.

OVERSEER: You have no doubt of that?

ETHICS: There's no way that SCP-321 can be kept alive without the resources of the Foundation. There's certainly no way for her existence to be kept from the public. She's too – unusual. And her condition hasn't really changed in twenty years. She hasn't stopped growing, she hasn't developed mentally, she still heals at an unnaturally fast rate. She's still anomalous. She has to stay in containment.

OVERSEER: So the Ethics Committee would deny this request?

ETHICS: Frankly, I'd be amazed if we ever saw it. The other Overseers would make sure it never got to the stage of being shown to us.

OVERSEER: I see.

ETHICS: Is that all?

OVERSEER: Does the black moon howl?

ETHICS: Only when waning.

OVERSEER: Yes. Yes, that will be all.

Ethics nods, hands back the document, and leaves. After she has gone, Overseer stares at the document, then tears it in two and crumples it up, stuffing the crumpled remains into his suit pocket.

4

A corridor somewhere in a Foundation facility building. Commander and Fifthist enter, strolling, mid-conversation.

COMMANDER: ...his tone of voice changed, he said “These aren’t my arms”. And then he ripped his own head off. [*pause*] I'm still not sure how he did that. We haven't got the autopsy results yet, but there didn't seem to be anything unusual about his arms. How did he get the leverage? It's got to be something anomalous. I mean, over and above the obvious fact that he was being telepathically controlled from outside the building. Which has got some people very nervous, I can tell you. And I don't blame them.

FIFTHIST: But the control ended with his death?

COMMANDER: Oh, yes. Just as well, really. We're not trained to deal with walking corpses. I mean, I can shoot a gun if I have to, but I haven't had to in a long time.

FIFTHIST: Amen to that. Oh, and Commander, while I have you, perhaps you'd look over a personnel file. [*Hands him a file*.]

COMMANDER: No problem. [*Reads*] Interesting. A civilian. Exposed to SCP-701. Survived. Not affected by the memetic properties of the text.

FIFTHIST: There's more. Turn the page.

COMMANDER: [*reading*] You had her exposed to... Are you mad? That could have killed her!

FIFTHIST: But it didn't.

COMMANDER: And if it didn't kill her, it could have left her permanently insane.

FIFTHIST: But it didn't! You forget, Commander, I’ve been studying anomalous memes for decades. I understand them better than almost anyone in the Foundation. I suspected from the start that there was something resilient about her brain, and I was right. Do you think you could use her?

COMMANDER: Are these test results accurate?

FIFTHIST: One hundred per cent.

COMMANDER: But that means she's... she's got some sort of in-born protection against anomalous memes.

FIFTHIST: Exactly.

COMMANDER: But you implanted with her with the Black Moon Protocol.

FIFTHIST: Purely as a backup. It will never really be necessary to test her for infection, because she will never, in fact, be infected.

COMMANDER: How? I mean... a meme is just information. An anomalous meme is just information that has effects we can't explain. How can she be resistant to information and still have an IQ of -- [*flips papers*] 120? I mean, that doesn't make any sense. Are you sure she's not anomalous?

FIFTHIST: This is the only thing that's unusual about her.

COMMANDER: Isn't it enough?

FIFTHIST: Perhaps. But, Commander, don't you think we should make use of her?

COMMANDER: If she's anomalous --

FIFTHIST: Oh, please!

COMMANDER: If she's anomalous, we have to contain her. That's what we do.

FIFTHIST: She's not hostile. She's not dangerous.

COMMANDER: Not all the things we contain are dangerous. We still contain them.

FIFTHIST: And in some cases, we make use of them. They're too helpful to leave locked up in storage. [*pause*] Besides. She is not anomalous. Some people are just... lucky.

COMMANDER: Lucky.

FIFTHIST: Some people are taller than others. Some people have darker skin or better memories. Is it so hard to believe that a resistence to anomalous memes might be something that could occur naturally?

COMMANDER: If she found it impossible to learn anything, it would make sense. Then it would just mean her brain didn't accept new information, no matter what it was. But the danger with anomalous memes is that they don't seem any different from any other unit of information. That's why they can spread so far, do so much damage. The only reason *The Hanged King's Tragedy* hasn't caused widespread slaughters is because it takes so long to rehearse a production. We're usually able to step in before the cast get to the point of no return.

FIFTHIST: Though we didn't step in, this time. We missed it. Technically, you missed it,

since containing memetic anomalies is your task force's responsibility.

COMMANDER: [*defensive*] It was a glitch in the software. It happens! I was cleared of wrongdoing, I was put back in charge –

FIFTHIST: Commander, please. I wasn't accusing you of anything. It was just a fact. [*pause*] Maybe she has an unusually strong sense of self. So, consciously or subconsciously, she rejects any information that threatens the core of her identity.

COMMANDER: [*pause*] Maybe.

FIFTHIST: I don't want to pull rank –

COMMANDER: We have the same rank!

FIFTHIST: True. But your reports go to me, and I report directly to the O5 Council. I could go over your head, make a personnel recommendation. I don't want to have to do that. I know you Task Force commanders like to have control over who's on your squad.

COMMANDER: What is so important about this woman?

FIFTHIST: [*Siddenly intense*] She fills a hole. [*pause, back to normal*] Look. Commander. Just trust me, all right?

COMMANDER: Do I have a choice?

FIFTHIST: Does the black moon howl?

COMMANDER: Only when waning. [*pause*] Fine. She can join the task force.

FIFTHIST: That's all I ask.

5

A patch of waste ground on the outskirts of a city. D-Class runs on stage, distressed and exhausted, and collapses, clutching his head.

NEWBIE: [*offstage, recorded/distorted voice*] Just keep calm, keep calm. He can't hurt you. He can't -- shit, what was he in prison for? Don't think about that. You have the syringe, that's all you need. He's weak, he's tired. Explain the situation. Radio for backup if --

D-CLASS: I can hear you! Jesus Christ, do you ever stop thinking? Does anyone ever stop thinking?

NEWBIE: [*offstage, recorded/distorted voice*] Okay, okay, no element of surprise, doesn't matter, keep --

D-CLASS: Are you going to kill me?

Newbie comes onstage. From now on, her offstage voice and onstage voice double each other except where indicated. Where there is a difference, the offstage version is in [square brackets].

NEWBIE: No. You look upset.

D-CLASS: I can't block them out. Are you here to help me? *Can* you help me?

NEWBIE: Yes. [Provided he's only at stage 3.]

D-CLASS: Stage 3? What does that mean?

NEWBIE: Stage 3 of the infection. There are five stages. At stage 4, you become contagious. The infection can't be cured.

D-CLASS: You mean it *can* be cured now?

NEWBIE: Yes. [With a medical coma and high doses of amnestic drugs. Enough to block out the memories of the past week.]

D-CLASS: And that works?

NEWBIE: Yes. [Most of the time.]

D-CLASS: I'll risk it. I don't want to know what people are thinking any more.

NEWBIE: [The syringe. Offer the syringe.] I can sedate you. You're obviously in distress.

D-CLASS: What the fuck do you care?

NEWBIE: Don't listen to my words. Listen to my thoughts. [I want to help him. God, look at him, he looks miserable. Poor guy! I can't imagine what it must be like, to be in a prison and have to listen to the thoughts of all the people there.]

D-CLASS: It was murder.

NEWBIE: What?

D-CLASS: I was in for murder.

NEWBIE: [Why is he telling me that?] It doesn't matter.

D-CLASS: You really think that, don't you? Will that stuff knock me out?

NEWBIE: It could knock out an elephant.

D-CLASS: Go ahead.

He rolls up his sleeve and offers his arm. Newbie takes out a syringe and injects him.

NEWBIE: [Oh, God, I've never done this before. They shouldn't have sent a new recruit.]

D-CLASS: Don't worry about it. What's the worst that can happen?

NEWBIE: I don't want to hurt you.

D-CLASS: You won't. Whoa, that's strong stuff.

He keels over. Newbie checks his pulse, then takes out her radio.

NEWBIE: This is Eta-10-D calling Eta-10 Command. Subject 405-2-R is down. The area is safe. I repeat: the area is safe. Over.

A pause. Commander enters.

COMMANDER: Does the black moon howl?

NEWBIE: Only when waning.

COMMANDER: That's the subject?

NEWBIE: Yes, sir.

COMMANDER: Good job. He's not even injured. The med team's on their way to evacuate him.

NEWBIE: He'll be all right?

COMMANDER: Should be.

NEWBIE: Good. [*Beat*] And he won't remember?

COMMANDER: Not a thing.

NEWBIE: Good. [*Beat*] So.

COMMANDER: So?

NEWBIE: How'd I do?

COMMANDER: Oh, fine. A little unorthodox.

NEWBIE: Unorthodox?

COMMANDER: But that's not always a bad thing. I mean, it's more common for new recruits to go in guns blazing --

NEWBIE: I don't have a gun. Was I supposed to have a gun?

COMMANDER: You've been trained in the use of firearms. If you had requested a gun, you would have been given one. But you didn't. I was going to make a suggestion, but then I thought: let's see how this pans out. A new approach might work just as well.

NEWBIE: I didn't think…

COMMANDER: Didn't think what?

NEWBIE: I didn't think it would help. He'd know I was carrying it, he'd be able to tell if I was going to fire, or --

COMMANDER: Or if you were bluffing. Yes, of course.

NEWBIE: If it had been necessary --

COMMANDER: I know.

NEWBIE: I just didn't think it was. Necessary, I mean.

COMMANDER: And you were right! So it all worked out. [*Pause.*] But, you know. Next time.

NEWBIE: If you tell me to pull the trigger I will.

COMMANDER: Of course. [*Pause.*] You have to be cold. You understand? Not cruel, but cold. Don't get attached, don't make connections. Don't make personal conversation with the D-Class --

NEWBIE: He's not D-Class.

COMMANDER: He will be. [*off her reaction*] Oh, yes, that's the order. Well, he's a lifer already, isn't he? No one's going to miss him. You might even see him again. Though you probably won't. They don't last long, the D-Class personnel.

NEWBIE: I thought I was saving him.

COMMANDER: You were. Temporarily, to be sure. But nobody lives forever.

NEWBIE: No.

COMMANDER: Or if they did, we'd have to contain them!

NEWBIE: Yes.

COMMANDER: That was a joke. [*Pause.*] Look, you did well. Just... that was an easy one. They won't always be that easy.

NEWBIE: Thank you, sir.

COMMANDER: Come on. The med team are coming. We need to get back to base.

They exit.

6

Limbo. Fifthist crosses the stage back and forth as she speaks, holding a book titled Star Signals. The title is clearly visible and legible to the audience.

FIFTHIST: In your current society, you are encouraged to "be yourself", as if this is the key to making your desires real. What does that mean? It doesn't mean anything. You can't be anyone other than yourself. If you were to be someone else, you would still be "you", and "you" would be someone who is someone else. There is no getting out from under existence. Because you can't be anyone else, it stands to reason that, if you want change in your reality, it is the world that must change to suit you. You must mold your phenomenological landscape into one where all your goals are achieved.

Now imagine that the place where your desires are made real has a name. It's called the Fifth World. The Fifth World is the cosmos twisted around you into the shape you will wish for. It has never been, but you can make it so. If the current world is like a tight, collared suit, then the Fifth World is like a flowing robe that allows complete freedom of movement. You will never truly move before you move in the Fifth World.

7

A break room in a Foundation facility building. Commander is sitting drinking a cup of coffee. Newbie comes in, starts at the sight of him, then makes like everything's normal.

COMMANDER: Agent.

NEWBIE: Sir.

COMMANDER: Sit down for a minute. I want to talk to you off the record before we do the official debrief.

Newbie sits down, uneasy.

COMMANDER: First of all, and I'm sorry about this, but: does the black moon howl?

NEWBIE: Only when waning. Sir, I don't understand.

COMMANDER: Neither do I. What happened out there? I don't mean -- I was there, I saw it, I don't need you to describe the, the actions you took. I'd like to know what was going on in your head.

NEWBIE: Isn't it obvious?

COMMANDER: Pretend I'm an idiot and tell me anyway.

NEWBIE: I froze. I couldn't handle it. I couldn't -- I panicked, and I froze.

COMMANDER: Really?

NEWBIE: Yes.

COMMANDER: You panicked.

NEWBIE: Yes.

COMMANDER: Agent, I did not see panic out there. I didn't see you shaking, or dropping your weapon, or running away. I saw you very calmly striding into the house and leading ten infected subjects outside before you set fire to the building.

[*pause*]

That is what happened, isn't it?

NEWBIE: Yes.

COMMANDER: Do you want to tell me why?

NEWBIE: I knew they were in there and I didn't want them to die.

COMMANDER: So you disobeyed an order?

NEWBIE: We're not robots. Sir. We have discretion in the field, we're allowed to make

judgments --

COMMANDER: Not when those judgments cause a containment breach!

NEWBIE: Only one of them got away! And the other Task Force members tracked him down and dosed him before he could spread the infection to anyone else. So I don't know if you could even call that a containment breach --

COMMANDER: That is not your decision!

NEWBIE: No, sir. It's yours. And I know that if you decide to call it a containment breach, I will be disciplined. Demoted, probably. Maybe sent to a cell.

COMMANDER: Maybe terminated.

NEWBIE: Maybe. One life for ten. Sounds like a good bargain to me.

COMMANDER: Even if it's your life?

NEWBIE: "We die in the dark so they can live in the light." That's what you said, isn't it? We should sacrifice ourselves for civilians, not the other way around.

COMMANDER: Was that what you were thinking when you turned off your radio?

NEWBIE: I was thinking I didn't want to stand by while I could hear people screaming in a burning building. Again.

COMMANDER: Again?

NEWBIE: It would have been just like Tacoma. I know there really wasn't a choice that time, I know we had to kill -- to terminate those people. But I had to listen to them, and it was -- I just didn't want to go through that again. Not if I could avoid it.

COMMANDER: When you say "Tacoma"...

NEWBIE: Tacoma, Washington. The mission on the 10th of February. An outbreak of SCP-020. Six infected families in an apartment block. You were there, sir, you should --

COMMANDER: You remember Tacoma?

NEWBIE: I... yes. I was there. I was operating the camera remotely --

COMMANDER: Agent, that mission was so traumatic for all the agents involved that I was authorised to give you all class-B amnestics as soon as you'd been debriefed. The Task Force psychiatrist said that was the only way to ensure you'd all be fit to return to duty.

[*pause*]

NEWBIE: I... sir, I'm not affected by amnestics.

COMMANDER: What?

NEWBIE: I thought you knew. I don't understand why you don't.

COMMANDER: Neither do I, Agent. Neither do I. [*pause*] Look, something fishy's going on. Somebody… wanted you on the Task Force. Somebody who must have known that you… I don't know what that person had in mind, but I don't like it. I can't let you stay on. I know somebody in Archives. I can pull some strings, get you a desk job. Interested?

NEWBIE: Oh, yes! Yes, sir, that sounds fantastic.

COMMANDER: I'm not doing you a favour. I just want you tucked away somewhere safe while I look into whatever's going on. We're going to cover this up until I figure it out, but mark my words: you caused a containment breach. You'll answer for that.

NEWBIE: I understand.

COMMANDER: Take the rest of the week off -- unpaid. I'll arrange the transfer. And watch your step in future.

NEWBIE: I will.

8

An archive in a Foundation facility building. Newbie is consulting files while lines are spoken/played from offstage by multiple voices.

VOICES: Object class: Safe.

Object class: Euclid.

Object class: Keter. Downgrade to Euclid proposed, pending review of current containment procedures.

Data expunged. You do not have the necessary clearance to access this data. For further information, consult your site director.

Does the black moon howl?

NEWBIE: Only when waning.

VOICES: Correct response logged. Access renewed.

Lights down on Newbie, and simultaneously up on D-Class, who addresses the audience from one side of the stage.

D-CLASS: You ever hear the expression "to have your cake and eat it too"? It never made much sense to me before. I think I understand it now.

No, hold on, I'm getting ahead of myself. You see, I volunteered to come here. I chose this gig because the alternative was a guaranteed lethal injection a few years down the line, thank you very much to the great state of Texas. This way at least I'd have a chance, maybe. Get to do something a little bit interesting. Get a little bit more time. To do what, I don't know. Or I didn't, before.

I was expecting… I don't know what. Medical experiments, maybe. The kind of thing you can't do to humans. Or you can, but you're not supposed to. So it's either guinea pigs or saps like me. People nobody's going to miss. People who are going to die soon anyway and nobody cared about them when they were alive, so you can stick needles full of cancer in their eyeballs and nobody gives a shit.

Is that why they call us D-Class? D for "dead men walking"?

Anyway, my first day in, they lead me and two other guys into this room with a big birthday cake on a table, they hand us forks and plates and tell us to eat the cake. All of it.

Well, I don't know about other jails, but the one I was in? We never got within sniffing distance of a cake. Not even at Christmas. And I've always had a sweet tooth, so I tucked in. It was delicious! Little bit of a citrusy flavour. Whipped cream on top. Nice and moist. It didn't even occur to me that there might be something wrong with the cake until I looked up and saw the other two just staring at me.

They'd been here for longer. They knew what to expect. This wasn't it. Cake was not it.

But the guard – he was bored. Like he'd seen it all a thousand times. He probably had, too. "Eat the cake," he said, "and don't leave any crumbs."

So we finished the cake. I think I had more than my fair share, because when we were done, the agent in charge said I did a good job, and if I wanted, I could volunteer to do it again. Well, I said yes, of course. But I was curious. "What's up with the cake?" I said. "Why's it so important for us to eat it all?"

She said "These cakes are classified Keter. Without careful containment, their ectoentropic properties could bring about an NK-class end-of-the-world scenario."

I didn't know what that meant, and I told her so. And she looked at me dead in the eyes and said "These are not just any cakes. These are self-replicating cakes! That cake you ate will be back in a different form tomorrow. If you hadn't eaten all of the cake, there would be two cakes tomorrow where today there was one. If those two cakes weren't eaten, the day after tomorrow there would be four cakes. Then eight cakes. Then sixteen cakes. How long before the pressure of self-replicating cakes is enough to burst the lock on the door? How long before the cakes have filled this entire faculty? How long before they cover the surface of the Earth? Nothing but cake as far as the eye can see! Cake piled as high as Mount Everest! Cake soaking up all the water in the oceans! All life on this planet suffocated by cake! Cake! Cake! CAAAAAAKE!"

Pause

"You have a very important job," she said. "Don't fuck it up."

Lights down on D-Class and simultaneously up on Newbie, in a different position from when the lights went down. The voices continue from offstage.

VOICES: In the event of a containment breach, infected subjects must be terminated

immediately to avoid contagion.

In the event of a containment breach, Protocol Bellerophon-Alpha is to be enacted immediately. If Protocol Bellerophon-Alpha fails, Site-16's on-site nuclear weapon is to be detonated, regardless of loss of personnel.

Procedure 110-Montauk must be carried out daily.

Data expunged. You do not have the necessary clearance to access this data. For further information, consult your site director.

Does the black moon howl?

NEWBIE: Only when waning.

VOICES: Correct response logged. Access renewed.

Lights down on Newbie, and simultaneously up on Ethics, who addresses the audience from the opposite side of the stage from where D-Class spoke earlier.

ETHICS: I remember the day I learned what kind of organisation I was really working for. I'd been doing medical research. Working on cell cultures. Very unusual cell cultures. I could have kept on doing that for years. I would have been happier. I don't know why the head of research decided to bring me down into the basement, to show me --

I don't even know what you could call it. A giant? A child? It was a child, it had the proportions of a child, the face of a child, but it was nine feet tall. Its hair was white, its eyes pink. Pink and vacant. It turned its eyes on me, and there was nothing looking out. No mind, at least.

Then it started to cry. The head of research said: SCP-321 is alarmed by strangers. He said: We'll go in a minute. Just notice the size of its body. It has been contained by the Foundation for over thirty years, and it has not stopped growing in all that time. He said… The child was still crying. He said: Its heart nearly gave up ten years ago, because its limbs were so long, pumping blood to the extremities was too much of a strain. I had never heard anything like that child's cry before. He said: We made it an artificial heart. Unfortunately, the technology couldn't be used on a baseline human. It was a baby's cry, but coming from a body the size of a small house, it was deeper and louder and -- He said: It only works because SCP-321 heals so quickly.

My God, the relief when he led me out of that room!

That was where the cell cultures came from. From her. I had been working on them as if they were just – cells, growing in a petri dish. I knew they were unusual. No, they were more than unusual. They were extraordinary. In those cells, I could see cures for Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, spinal cord injuries –

She could save so many lives just by being what she was!

But only if we kept her alive. Constantly growing, and never growing up.

I requested a transfer a week later. I have worked for the Ethics Committee ever since.

Sometimes, I hear her cries when I dream.

Lights down on Ethics and simultaneously up on Newbie, in a different position from when the lights went down. The voices continue from offstage.

VOICES: Containment breach could result in a CK-class reality-restructuring event.

Containment breach could result in an XK-class end-of-the-world scenario.

Containment breach could result in an SK-class dominance shift.

SCP-231-7 may not be anaesthetised during Procedure 110-Montauk.

Data expunged. You do not have the necessary clearance to access this data. For further information, consult your site director.

Does the black moon howl?

NEWBIE: Only when waning.

VOICES: Correct response logged. Access renewed.

Lights down on Newbie, and simultaneously up on D-Class, who addresses the audience as before.

D-CLASS: I was in jail for 10 years before I came to this place. Before that, I was in a gang. Before that, I was in a different gang. I've never had a job. First time I killed someone, I was fourteen. Used a brick in a canvas shopping bag, swung it by the handle and whacked him in the head. His face was like raw bacon by the time I was finished.

That's where I started, and I didn't stop there.

So you know I'm not some kind of – if I was a different kind of person, maybe it would just –

Look, these people, these scientists or researchers or whatever the fuck they call

themselves, they fucking terrify me. The things they do! The things they *say*. The way they go on with their lives, as if – There's a pizza box in the breakroom at Site 17. It's magic or something. If you open it, there's always a pizza inside, and it's always your favourite pizza. They used me to test it. And now it's in the breakroom. The researchers eat their lunches from it. A fucking *magic pizza box* that is *never empty* no matter how many times you eat the pizza inside it! They eat that pizza for lunch!

And then they work the rest of their shift, in a house where the windows lead to another universe. Or a corridor where the walls talk to you about all the bad things you've done. All the mistakes you've made. All the people you've hurt.

And then they clock off, and they go home to their kids. Watch TV. Shop for curtains.

They don't tell us much. Us, being the D-Class personnel. D for Dope. D for Disposable. They tell us as little as they can manage. So they must know things we don't know, but what could they possibly know that would make any of this make sense?

Like, for instance… One time they brought me in to a room where there was a hamster. They let me pet it. It was cute, but, you know, just a hamster.

Pause. Bitter laughter.

I was in that room with that hamster for maybe half an hour. And then out of nowhere, suddenly I get this... wet sensation on my eyeball and I can see myself. From the front, and kind of low down, and only through one eye. And there's this pinky-red stuff around the edges of my vision. Now, I have no fucking clue what's going on except that it's disgusting and I want it to stop.

And then the hamster takes a bite. And I can feel it chewing through my eyeball while it's still attached to my brain, I can *see* the hamster's mouth while it's...

Pause. D is too upset to speak, tries to calm himself.

I don't think... I don't think you can even begin to try to comprehend how, how disgustingly fucked up that is! How – *how* does a hamster get to do that? Just – teleport somebody's fucking *eye* into its mouth? Where the fuck does a creature like that come from?

I passed out a minute later, thank Christ. I came to in the infirmary. *[Pause]* The doctor

said... said I was lucky. The Foundation sometimes needs people like you, he said. People with some really specific physical thing. They'll keep you around for sure, give you safe assignments. Just in case a man with a missing eye is what they need to contain some really dangerous monster.

Wow, I said. Lucky me.

Lights down on D-Class and simultaneously up on Newbie, in a different position from when the lights went down. The voices continue from offstage.

VOICES: The object was recovered in the home of its previous owner, who was found eviscerated in the house's basement.

The object was recovered in the home of its previous owner, who had committed suicide.

Long-term exposure to the object causes severe mental illness, including paranoid delusions and suicidal and homicidal impulses.

The object must only be handled by D-Class personnel.

Personnel involved in the administration of Procedure 110-Montauk are to be dosed with Class-B amnestics and rotated to a different site.

Data expunged. You do not have the necessary clearance to access this data. For further information, consult your site director.

Does the black moon howl?

Lights down on Newbie, and simultaneously up on D-Class and Ethics, who addresses the audience. Their lines sometimes overlap, but they are not aware of each other.

D-CLASS: We're not supposed to talk to each other.

ETHICS: There are things we're not allowed to remember.

D-CLASS: But they don't really try to stop us.

ETHICS: There are things we can't be made to forget.

D-CLASS: Not everybody wants to talk after the kind of shit that we go through.

ETHICS: Things that sear themselves into your brain.

D-CLASS: But sometimes...

ETHICS: Things that reshape your knowledge of the world so that if you allowed yourself to forget them, nothing would make sense any more.

D-CLASS: People talk, compare notes, tell the same stories.

ETHICS: There is knowledge that is like a burden.

D-CLASS: They kept me around longer than most. I heard a lot of stories.

ETHICS: Because once you know, you can't pretend to be innocent any more.

D-CLASS: And then I started hearing the gaps in between the stories.

ETHICS: Once you know, and do not act, you become culpable. You become complicit.

D-CLASS: I never wrote anything down. I remembered instead. They've got ways of dealing with that, too, but only if they know. I never let on.

ETHICS: We have to carry that burden for the rest of the world. Not just what we do, but the knowledge of what we do and what we allow others to do.

D-CLASS: They wrap it up in code words. I never cracked exactly what they meant.

ETHICS: So many times I have told myself: we are cold, but not cruel. So many times I have doubted that platitude, that party line.

D-CLASS: I only know it fucks people up.

ETHICS: Just as I have doubted that other line. “We die in the darkness so they may live in the light.” If we keep so many secrets, aren’t they the ones in darkness?

D-CLASS: You send a hardened psycho into this one detail, he'll come back shaking, quiet, tight-lipped. Like he's done something too big and too horrible to understand.

ETHICS: When I joined the Ethics Committee, I read the file on SCP-231. I had heard the rumours. They couldn’t compete with the reality. All those details laid out in clinical, scientific language.

BOTH: They call it Procedure 110-Montauk.

From this point, lights begin to fade up on Newbie, who is reading a file visibly labelled “SCP-231: SECURE CONTAINMENT PROCEDURES”.

ETHICS: It is vile.

D-CLASS: What do they have to do?

ETHICS: It is horrifying.

D-CLASS: Why do they have to do it?

ETHICS: It is necessary.

D-CLASS: What would happen if they just stopped doing it?

ETHICS: There is an apocalypse on the horizon, and this is the only way we can keep it from dawning.

D-CLASS: Can't they think of some other way?

ETHICS: The one we have in containment is the seventh of the group. The first six were all destroyed in containment breaches. Six breaches, each more catastrophic than the last. Each one set off by a Foundation agent who thought they had found a better way.

D-CLASS: And if we have to do shit like that to keep the world safe, is it really worth saving?

ETHICS: Or an agent so troubled by what they had done that they no longer cared whether their moral scruples left the world ablaze.

D-CLASS: I don't know up from down any more.

ETHICS: Have we become monsters in fighting monsters?

D-CLASS: I never thought I was a good man.

ETHICS: Are we staring into the void, or is the void staring out from inside us?

D-CLASS: I never knew where my limits were.

ETHICS: I once thought I knew the answers to these questions.

D-CLASS: I think I found a line I won't cross.

Pause.

BOTH: That poor girl. If only we could save her.

Lights down on Ethics and D-Class. Newbie is still staring at the file.

VOICES: You have attempted to access unauthorized data more than three times in the past 24 hours. This has been logged as aberrant behaviour and will result in further monitoring. Does the black moon howl?

[*pause*]

Does the black moon howl?

[*pause*]

Does the black moon howl?

NEWBIE: [*as if waking up*] Only when waning.

VOICES: Correct response logged. Access renewed.

Newbie stares at the file a little longer, then slams it shut.

NEWBIE: Why did I think this would be easier than field work?

9

Limbo. Fifthist directly addresses the audience, holding her Star Signals book high and counting off the pieces of advice on her fingers.

Some helpful advice that will save you in your coming weeks:

Mirrors are for other people.

Sit in a dark room by yourself for at least an hour per day. Move around as much as you're made to.

If you feel yourself developing a soul, go outside immediately and follow the direction of the smoke until you meet them.

Always listen for the sound slon of trwoll plr mlgn thei.

Love the archons. When you hate them, they see you.

Phase Two

Conference room. Overseer, Ethics and Fifthist seated at a conference table consulting papers. A laptop in front of Overseer. Commander enters, looks around and smiles before sitting down.

COMMANDER: The gang's all here.

FIFTHIST: Commander, please.

COMMANDER: What?

OVERSEER: Let's not waste time on niceties, Director. Mobile Task Forces don't foster the same decorum as faculty research staff.

FIFTHIST: That may be acceptable in the field, Overseer, but --

OVERSEER: Director!

COMMANDER: Wait, I – they didn't tell me – uh. You're an Overseer?

OVERSEER: That is correct. O5-7, at your service.

[*Pause*.]

COMMANDER: I know I was being investigated, but -- Am I in line for termination? Is that why I'm here?

OVERSEER: No, no --

FIFTHIST: This meeting is about the London Bridge incident, and your involvement – your task force's involvement.

OVERSEER: It's purely an information-gathering exercise. To determine the best course of action, going forward, for the SCP objects in question, for Site 33, and for your task force, ah --

COMMANDER: See No Evil. Er, I mean, Mobile Task Force Eta-10.

OVERSEER: Ah, yes. *[chuckles]* You see what I mean about decorum, Director? I'm sure your researchers don't call themselves, oh, "Bloodflies", or "Finger Painters".

COMMANDER: Are we under sanction? Is Eta-10 going to be disbanded?

OVERSEER: That is, in part, what this meeting is intended to determine. Please, Commander, relax. Nothing you say here in this room will be used against you. Besides, ah...

ETHICS: If we had decided to have you killed, you'd be dead already. So you see, you're

perfectly safe.

Awkward pause.

OVERSEER: Yes. Well. Let's get started, shall we? Yours is the task force dedicated to seeking out and securing anomalous objects with memetic or infohazardous or cognitohazardous properties – objects that may be dangerous to directly perceive with unfiltered human senses. Correct?

COMMANDER: Yes, sir.

OVERSEER: Hence, "See No Evil". A logical nickname. Now, Commander, we've all read the report, but perhaps you could expand on your task force's involvement in the clean-up after the release of the book known as *Star Signals* to the general public.

COMMANDER: Well, obviously, the top priority was getting hold of the books before anyone else did. We had help from two other MTFs – the "Front Runners" and the "Damn Feds" --

OVERSEER: Yes. The “Damn Feds” being the task force in charge of infiltrating law enforcement, and the “Front Runners” being?

COMMANDER: They try to prevent anomalous items from falling into the hands of any of the Groups of Interest. The book had been very widely distributed in Britain, and the Front Runners were concerned that Marshall, Carter & Dark might get hold of it.

OVERSEER: You mentioned that in the report, but I don't quite understand why. Marshall, Carter & Dark pride themselves on the exclusivity of their merchandise. A best-selling self-help book endorsed by American celebrities is hardly their sort of product.

COMMANDER: If it was still available in the shops, yeah. But by the time the clean-up was in progress there were very few copies still around. A book so powerful and dangerous that it had to be withdrawn from the market and pulped? That's exactly the kind of thing MC&D would try to sell. Though they'd probably have the text transcribed by hand onto vellum, with ink made from human blood. They’re morbid like that.

ETHICS: Blood makes terrible ink. Pale brown, and it fades very quickly.

Awkward pause.

OVERSEER: Another question raised by your report. How much did you know about the

book, and the incidents that prompted the Foundation's response? Not what you know now. What you knew at the time? Director, I'd like your answer too.

COMMANDER: Not much. The title, the publication details, and that it was a memetic hazard. Um, some stuff about the mental illnesses it caused – what was it called? Ojai Syndrome, that's it. To be honest, I figured info control was stronger than usual because of the memetic factor, so I didn't ask any more questions. In my line of work, ignorance is better than a bullet-proof vest.

OVERSEER: Director?

FIFTHIST: I'm not clear on the time frame. What period are you referring to?

OVERSEER: After Protocol Ophiuchus had taken effect.

FIFTHIST: Ah. Yes. Naturally, all our operatives of Level 3 clearance and below were affected by the protocol --

OVERSEER: Which is to say, everyone at Site 33 except yourself.

FIFTHIST: Yes. Being at clearance Level 4, I was exempt from the memetic controls mandated by the protocol. I knew that the book was an artefact of a religious nature. I knew that its contents could give its readers the ability to warp reality, and that – Overseer, some of this information is above the Commander's clearance.

OVERSEER: I'm waiving normal clearance requirements for the duration of this meeting. You can speak freely.

FIFTHIST: Ah. Well. At the time, I knew that the book had been very widely circulated and that, as a result of people reading it and following its instructions, some considerable reality-warping alterations had taken place.

OVERSEER: That's all.

FIFTHIST: At the time. Yes.

OVERSEER: Allow me to show you both something. This is footage taken from a mobile phone owned by a pedestrian who was present during the Tower Bridge incident, and who captured some of its more... disturbing elements.

Overseer opens the laptop, clicks some buttons, and sets it up to play before Fifthist and Commander.

OVERSEER: No sound, as you can hear. The first few agents to watch this with the sound

switched on started bleeding from their ears very shortly afterwards.

They watch, tense and uncertain.

COMMANDER: I don't see – I mean, this is just a Royal procession, it's not --

OVERSEER: Wait.

They continue watching, still tense. There is a different quality to the tension given off by Fifthist and by Commander: Fifthist knows what is coming, while Commander does not. The wait goes on for an awkward length of time, then Commander and Fifthist react to something they see, both with horror and disgust. Fifthist's reaction is slightly delayed.

During all of this, Ethics has had her head turned aside. Overseer has been watching Commander and Fifthist. After their reactions die down slightly, Overseer closes the laptop.

COMMANDER: My God!

FIFTHIST: Was it really necessary to show us that?

OVERSEER: Yes, I think it was. Just to confirm something. You were – both of you – ignorant of the involvement of the Fifth Church?

COMMANDER: Nobody briefed us on that, sir. See No Evil had never run into them before. All I knew about the Fifthists was what I could read in the dossiers.

FIFTHIST: I was unaware of their involvement.

OVERSEER: You weren't suspicious?

FIFTHIST: Site 33 had never before concerned itself with the Fifth Church. Until this incident, I was under the impression that they only operated in the US.

OVERSEER: I think that may be true *now*. They bit off rather more than they could chew, and they've quietened down considerably. But then... *[shakes head]*

COMMANDER: We didn't know --

OVERSEER: Exactly. You didn't know. Director, you didn't know either. The O5 Council didn't know. 250,000 copies of a text that gives people the power to warp reality, not just in the present but in the past, and *we didn't know*! Not just you and I, not just those of us in this room – the entire Foundation! They were under our noses, printing the books, selling them, talking about them on television, for Christ's sake – and not one single person in the Foundation noticed anything amiss. Now, I ask you, Commander, Director, does that sound plausible to you?

FIFTHIST: Naturally the failure of our vigilance is a cause for deep concern. This containment breach --

OVERSEER: It wasn't a containment breach. It was a CK-class reality-restructuring event. And I'm not sure you're treating this with the seriousness it deserves.

FIFTHIST: As soon as Protocol Ophiuchus was initiated, I began a rigorous internal enquiry and rooted out several Fifthist infiltrators who were duly terminated --

ETHICS: Duly. Nice word, that. From "due", as in "due process". *[Pause]* But in the Foundation, "due process" means we interrogate them before we kill them. Squeeze every drop of information out of them before we pull the trigger. Which you did not do.

FIFTHIST: *[Pause]* Is this a tribunal? Am I being accused of something? I assure you, Overseer, all possible means were used to ensure that we learned everything there was to learn. We did not shy away from enhanced interrogation techniques --

ETHICS: Torture.

FIFTHIST: What?

ETHICS: You did not shy away from torture.

FIFTHIST: I hardly see --

OVERSEER: You have read the Foundation's handbook on interrogation, Director? Of course you have. And since you've read it, and no doubt digested its contents quite thoroughly, you will be aware that so-called "enhanced interrogation techniques" – what my colleague rightly refers to as torture – are utterly useless as a means of acquiring information. They are, however, a very effective means of extracting confessions. [*Pause]* So, tell me, Director. How long have you been a member of the Fifth Church?

Commander leaps to his feet and draws his gun, pointing it at Fifthist, who is defiant.

FIFTHIST: I want an advocate. I demand --

OVERSEER: You're in no position to make demands. You'll get nothing from me, and nothing from the Church, either. They've cut you loose, haven't they? Was it after the Tower Bridge incident? Bit off more than you could chew there. Went too far even for your masters. They weren't so keen on re-shaping reality when it was going to end

up looking like *that*. So they let you go. Was that why you had to resort to such crude measures? Torture, rather than mind-control?

Fifthist leans back and smiles, her manner and accent changing completely. The mask is off now, and she is no longer the proper, by-the-book Foundation officer. She is gleeful and unrepenting and is happy to let her madness be seen.

FIFTHIST: [*to COMMANDER*] Go ahead. I know you want to ask.

COMMANDER: Does the black moon howl?

FIFTHIST: [*screeching*] It howls for the blood of the wicked and the damned and it will not be silent until it has drunk its fill! [*She twitches, then settles.*] I suppose the cat's out of the bag now, huh? Ain't you scared I'm gonna smoke up the joint, Mister Overseer? Like maybe I still got some threads in my hand. I tug a little here, a little there, make the tapestry come undone? [*Mad laughter.*]

OVERSEER: We have precautions in place against that occurrence.

FIFTHIST: *[laughing]* Precautions! Ain't that a hoot and a half. They're not going to help you. The stars are disappearing from the sky. The fifth world is coming. It's going to find all the holes inside you and plug 'em up. Not a damned thing you can do about it! Tlaol sfenit nihen!

She throws her head back and begins spewing smoke from her mouth. Commander shoots her and she falls dead.

Pause.

OVERSEER: She was the last one. The last one we know about, anyway.

COMMANDER: Is that smoke dangerous?

OVERSEER: Not in such small quantities. Well done, Commander. That was a test. You passed.

Pause. Commander holsters his weapon.

COMMANDER: Did you think it was me?

OVERSEER: We weren't sure. We'd narrowed it down to either you or her. There were gaps in the records, omissions, inconsistencies. In your case, they centred on a certain new recruit.

COMMANDER: I know the one. [*Indicating Fifthist*] She advised that I recruit her. And she

lied about – well, she didn't tell me something pretty crucial. I knew something was up, so I started my own investigation –

OVERSEER: Yes, and that was the right thing to do, but you should have informed the O5 Council. Because you didn't, suspicion fell on you. Still, it's all worked out now.

COMMANDER: Has it? [*beat*] I used to liaise with her, regularly. Consult on missions and containment procedures. She was a good site director.

OVERSEER: Of course she was. If she had been bad at her job, she would have lost her position of influence, and then the Fifth Church would have had no use for her.

COMMANDER: Sir. If I ask you what just happened, with the smoke and – if I ask, am I going to get a straight answer?

OVERSEER: I'm afraid everything you've seen and heard at this meeting is above your clearance level. I could give you a straight answer, but you're going to be dosed with amnestics as soon as you go out that door.

COMMANDER: Figures. Class A?

OVERSEER: Class A. *[checks watch]* The calibration on the one-hour dose is always a little rough. If you did anything important before coming here, you should probably stay for another half hour.

COMMANDER: No, I – before I came here I was cleaning up the break room, I won't lose anything that matters. Overseer...

OVERSEER: Yes?

COMMANDER: Protocol Ophiuchus – it worked, didn't it? The books are out of circulation. The... restructuring was... reversed. Undone. Wasn't it?

Pause. Overseer and Ethics exchange a look.

COMMANDER: No, I know, it's above my clearance. I should go.

He makes to leave. Ethics stands up. He stops.

ETHICS: Protocol Ophiuchus was a partial success.

COMMANDER: Partial?

OVERSEER: [*sighing*] The details are too numerous to recount, but suffice it to say... There was a time when history recorded the occurrence of a major rebellion in India in 1921. Not any more. The records don't show it happening, and nobody alive remembers

that things were ever different. The only reason we even know about this is because we heard about it from intercepted Fifth Church broadcasts. We lost three weeks from human history, and we'll never know exactly what was in them, or what changed as a result.

COMMANDER: Jesus.

OVERSEER: This was the last of the clean-up. We got lucky, Commander. We got sloppy, we got caught, and we got lucky, in that order, and that's why you and I are talking to each other and not belching smoke or cutting patterns into each other's skin. *[Smiles.]* I am saying this for my own benefit, of course. You won't remember any of it.

COMMANDER: Including the video?

OVERSEER: Especially the video.

COMMANDER: Well, that's something. Thank you, Overseer.

OVERSEER: Don't thank me. It's my duty.

Commander nods and leaves.

OVERSEER: And then there were two.

Pause.

What, no comments? No judgements? No pithy little verdicts?

ETHICS: You know that's not how this works.

OVERSEER: Oh, yes. We have to keep up certain pretences, even among ourselves. All right. My considered opinion, as a member of the O5 Council, is that the Foundation's UK facilities are irredeemably tainted. They were either corrupted by the Fifth Church or too incompetent to see them coming. I say we salt the earth. Terminate the lot.

ETHICS: How many people is that?

OVERSEER: Hm, about five thousand.

ETHICS: Five thousand, two hundred and seventeen.

Pause.

OVERSEER: In exchange for a stable timeline? A comprehensible history? What was it you said about Procedure 110-Montauk? 'A high price, but a worthy purchase'.

ETHICS: The Ethics Committee will not approve any such proposal.

OVERSEER: *[surprised]* Oh? *[Pause]* Your reasoning?

ETHICS: Firstly, the expense involved in replacing all 5,217 personnel and re-establishing all the essential sites and faculties would be considerable.

OVERSEER: Our resources are vast --

ETHICS: But not infinite. Secondly, the time lost, the expertise lost, the opportunities lost while our British bases are being replaced *will* result in anomalous items and creatures slipping through our fingers. Not 'may'. Will. Both those already contained and those currently at large. We cannot enter the consequences of such losses into any kind of cost-benefit calculation because they are intrinsically incalculable.

OVERSEER: Hm. *[Pause]* There's a 'thirdly', isn't there? I can hear you not saying it.

ETHICS: Thirdly... Overseer, I am the only person on the Ethics Committee who was appointed by the Committee and not by the O5 Council. So I am the only person on the Committee who will tell you this. You are not proposing this plan because you think it's necessary. You are proposing this plan because you are embarrassed, and you want to cover your embarrassment with a grand, massive gesture. *[Overseer makes as if to protest; Ethics cuts him off with a sharp gesture.]* No, don't interrupt. The Foundation was caught with its pants down, and something unspeakably horrible happened as a result. That is a fact that you cannot change. And it may seem that in the face of such a huge event, we *must* do something equally huge – but no. No. There is no 'must'. There is only what is, and what we can do about it. We do not have the power to undo what was done, no matter how much blood we spill on the ground. What would this mass termination accomplish? Would it frighten the Fifth Church? They're all so insane that they're beyond being frightened by anything the Foundation can do. Would it flush out any remaining infiltrators in the UK? Well, yes, and if you were to cut off your head you'd never suffer from dandruff again. Overseer, this proposal is not a practical, rational, considered attempt to respond to what the Fifth Church has done. If you were to do this, it would be… It would be an act of penance. Vast, and gratuitous. And the back you would be flagellating would not be your own.

I will not allow this. The Ethics Committee will not allow the O5 Council to make

thousands of agents sacrifice their lives so that you can save face.

Pause.

OVERSEER: *[gesturing at Fifthist]* You're damned lucky that Commander has left the room, or you'd be as dead as she is.

ETHICS: Of course, you would never kill me with your own hands. That's not your style at all.

OVERSEER: You know me so well. I suppose that's what you're for, you and your committee. To know our weaknesses and protect us from them. *[Rising to go]* I will recommend to the O5 Council that Site 33 be dismantled, cellar to roof, and all agents relocated. I will also recommend doubling the compliment of all task forces dedicated to internal surveillance and investigation. And, hm... a new task force, specifically devoted to monitoring and suppressing the activities of the Fifth Church. We'll call them the "Smoke Detectors".

ETHICS: The Ethics Committee will approve all those proposals.

OVERSEER: Good.

Overseer goes to leave, but stops as Ethics speaks.

ETHICS: Overseer, I don't want you to leave with a misconception. You may have been carrying it around for a while.

OVERSEER: So much for pretences. Well, what is it?

ETHICS: We don't protect *you* from your weaknesses. We don't much care about the O5 Council, or the Foundation, for that matter. The Foundation can take care of itself. We protect everyone else.

Pause. Overseer stares at Ethics with barely-muted hostility.

OVERSEER: When you say 'we', you never mean the Foundation, do you? Always the Ethics Committee. It's almost as if we're not on the same side.

ETHICS: Conscience isn't always on the same side as will.

OVERSEER: Now I remember why you people aren't allowed to carry weapons. Good day.

Overseer leaves. Ethics goes over to Fifthist's corpse, looks at it, and looks heavenward.

ETHICS: God, if you exist, and if you have the inclination to listen to human prayers and allow them to guide your actions, which seems unlikely, please care for this woman's

soul. She turned some of it into smoke, but I'm sure what's left of it is salvageable. She wanted to... fill the holes.

Pause.

And please, God, at least until I find someone to fill my seat at the Committee – please, keep me from going crazy. Amen.

Phase Three

1

Stage illuminated along a narrow strip. D-class, carrying a jar of red liquid, walks excruciatingly slowly and quietly along the illuminated strip.

D-CLASS: I don't understand what --

NEWBIE: *[from offstage]* Quiet.

D-class keeps moving until he reaches the end. He crouches down, opens the jar, and dips his finger in the liquid.

D-CLASS: Now the pattern?

NEWBIE: *[from offstage]* Yes. But no talking.

D-class traces a complex pattern on the floor with the liquid, then reseals the jar and turns to go, this time moving at a normal speed.

NEWBIE: *[from offstage]* Slow down!

D-class resumes walking at the previous speed. When he reaches his starting point, he visibly relaxes.

D-CLASS: How'd I do, Doc?

NEWBIE: *[from offstage]* Terrible. You died three times.

D-CLASS: Oh. [*Beat*] Last time, you said I died ten times.

Newbie emerges from offstage, facing D-class.

NEWBIE: You have to do it again. No noise. No changes of pace. No hesitation. If you speak, you die. If you move too quickly, you die. If you spend too long in the corridor, you die.

D-CLASS: And if I fuck up the pattern?

NEWBIE: Every man and woman within fifteen kilometres of the site will die. Painfully.

D-CLASS: You're not like the others.

NEWBIE: No personal remarks, please, D-14329.

D-CLASS: Like that, right there. The others never said 'please'.

NEWBIE: You need to do it again. No mistakes this time.

D-CLASS: Whatever you say, Doc.

NEWBIE: I'm not – Just remember what I said.

D-CLASS: I'll get it with another run. Maybe two.

NEWBIE: You're doing a minimum of three more practice runs. When you're in the penitentiary, you're going to be subject to hallucinations --

D-CLASS: What, like, bleeding walls, rattling chains, that kind of thing?

NEWBIE: Yes. And worse. And you must not respond. The instructions remain exactly the same, no matter what you see or hear. No noise. Slow movement. Don't linger.

D-CLASS: Is it possible I might hallucinate you giving me orders?

NEWBIE: Huh. [*Beat*] There's no record of anything like that. But that could just mean that the only ones who heard that kind of hallucination were the ones who didn't survive to make a report.

D-CLASS: How many people have died doing this job? [*Beat*] Stupid question. You're not allowed to tell me.

NEWBIE: No, I can't tell you because I don't know. I could find out, if I went through all the records. The information's there, it's just not all pulled together like that. Are you sure you want to know?

D-CLASS: No. Yes. No – I – how could I know? Until I know what the answer is, how can I know whether I want to know it or not? I mean, if five hundred guys have died, I'd rather not know. But if it's only half a dozen... fuck, I don't know.

NEWBIE: You mean, you want to know the answer, but only if it'll make it easier to do the job?

D-CLASS: I guess.

NEWBIE: You're not like the others either.

D-CLASS: What do you mean?

NEWBIE: You were on cake duty. I don't know why they re-assigned you here. Luck of the draw, probably.

D-CLASS: D-Class don't give a shit. Is that it?

NEWBIE: Am I wrong? Why should you give a shit? 'D' for 'disposable'. 'Doomed'. 'Dead'. And you all know it, don't you? I mean, you, for instance – you've lasted eight months, which is two months longer than average. [*Beat*] We shouldn't be talking like this. It's fraternizing.

D-CLASS: It's not personal.

NEWBIE: It's not about the SCP. That's all we're supposed to talk about. Your duties relating to the SCP.

D-CLASS: It'd be easier to do my duties if I knew what the fuck was going on.

NEWBIE: [*weary*] That's what you all say. It feels like it would be like that, doesn't it? Maybe it is, some of the time. I used to believe it myself.

D-CLASS: What happened?

NEWBIE: I found out. I found out some of it, anyway. Once you know something, you can't stop knowing it. [*Laughs*] Unless the site director decides to dose you with amnestics. But they don't work on me. And even if they did, they don't give them away just because you want peace of mind.

D-CLASS: I wouldn't know peace of mind if it smacked me in the face.

NEWBIE: And you never will. And neither will I. [*Pause*] Get to the start point. We're running through this three more times.

2

Ethics appears on stage, silent, troubled. Hold for several seconds. She makes to speak twice, then shakes her head. On the third attempt, she speaks.

ETHICS: I often think: what a comfort it would be to go mad.

I see the Foundation's psychiatric counsellors twice as often as the standard routine. We all do, all of us on the Committee. We aren't allowed to forget, so we have to do a lot of processing.

The SCP Foundation has access to the finest psychiatric care in the world. But even they, with all their training and experience, all the advanced anomalous technology they can use – they can't keep us all sane. They do a wonderful job, mind you. But there are still a great many of us who fall through the cracks.

Pause

I need more time.

I don't kid myself I've done a perfect job. I have nightmares about the mistakes I've made. I like to terrify myself, sometimes, by thinking of all the SCPs I've encountered that could have affected my judgement. I could be a gibbering lunatic and not know it. Or – and this is so much worse – I could be completely sane except for one unshakeable belief – one utterly false belief that nobody would notice until it was too late.

Of course, that's not what really haunts me. What really keeps me awake at night is the thought that I… that I'm not good enough. Not wise enough. Not strong enough. That maybe nobody in the whole world is fit to do the job I do.

It would be so much better to go mad all the way! Lose touch with reality altogether. Really, what has reality ever done for me?

But I can't. Not yet. The O5 don't like me. If I go, without leaving behind someone to take my place, they'll fill my chair themselves. They'll find someone more pliable. Someone who'll approve everything and deny nothing. Someone who believes their hands are clean. Someone who can sleep, even after seeing the kinds of things I've seen. Doing the kinds of things I've done.

Pause

It will be such a relief when I can finally go mad!

3

Newbie, alone on stage, pacing, tense, a radio handset in her hands.

NEWBIE: [*into radio*] Where the hell is that D-Class? We've been waiting here for – *[She spots something in the distance.]* Oh, no, scratch that. Yeah, I see him. Yeah, well, fuck you too, this is a Keter-class containment site, so – Yeah, yeah, over and out.

D-class enters.

NEWBIE: Where's your escort?

D-CLASS: Left me behind at the base of the hill. What's the story, doc?

NEWBIE: What's up?

D-CLASS: What?

NEWBIE: You should have said 'What's up, Doc?' That was a golden opportunity for a Bugs Bunny reference, and you missed it. Though, really, you shouldn't call me 'Doc'. Most of the researchers have doctorates, but I never even finished my bachelor's degree.

D-CLASS: You okay, Doc?

NEWBIE: The answer to that question is always no. But it doesn't matter. We've got a job to do, and if we don't do it, the world will end.

D-CLASS: For real?

NEWBIE: For real. The technical term is 'XK-class end-of-the-world scenario'. Or, as we call it in the Foundation, 'Tuesday'.

D-CLASS: This is a Keter-class detail?

NEWBIE: Yeah. [*Beat*] Wait, how do you know about object classes? That’s not in the D-Class briefing.

D-CLASS: You don't remember me?

NEWBIE: I'm sorry, should I?

D-CLASS: Probably not. But I remember you. You're the only one I've ever had to work with who would say a thing like 'sorry' to me. You said 'please' last time.

NEWBIE: The penitentiary.

D-CLASS: Yeah.

NEWBIE: And before that – before that, you were on cake duty.

D-CLASS: It's not exactly a full-time job. They only let you eat the cakes once a month. I had to do other stuff all the time.

NEWBIE: Still. Cake duty. Is that where you learned about object classes?

D-CLASS: I really wanted to know why they were freaking out so much about those cakes.

NEWBIE: NK-class end-of-the-world scenario. Civilisation destroyed by unimpeded matter replication.

D-CLASS: And the K stands for Keter, which is Hebrew for 'crown'. [*Beat*] You didn't... ask for me, then?

NEWBIE: I couldn't even if I wanted to. I don't get to choose who they send me.

D-CLASS: You could have asked for me by number.

NEWBIE: D-numbers are recycled. After you die, somebody else will be D-14329.

D-CLASS: Figures. D for disposable.

NEWBIE: We're not supposed to think of you as people. If we did, we wouldn't be able to –

D-CLASS: I'm dead, aren't I? This detail, this mission, it's going to kill me?

Pause.

NEWBIE: Yes.

D-CLASS: Well, fuck.

NEWBIE: You knew it was coming. Sooner or later.

D-CLASS: So do you! Nobody lives forever. There's a difference between that and 'hey, dude, you're going to die in the next ten minutes!' [*Pause*] Is it going to hurt?

NEWBIE: Yes.

D-CLASS: Fuck! [*Beat*] Well, that's better than if you'd said 'I don't know'.

NEWBIE: I'm sorry. I don't – I hate euphemisms. We tell so many lies in this job. So many words we use to cover up what we really mean. 'Terminate' instead of 'kill', 'subject' instead of 'person', 'D-Class personnel' instead of --

D-CLASS: Cannon fodder?

NEWBIE: Yeah.

D-CLASS: It makes it easier. I mean, I guess that's why. I wouldn't know.

NEWBIE: I suppose that what we do is hard enough. Anything we *can* do to make it easier.

D-CLASS: Does it make sense?

NEWBIE: What?

D-CLASS: You know. The – stuff. The anomalies. All of that. Does it make sense to you?

Pause.

NEWBIE: No.

D-CLASS: Fuck. Fuck!

NEWBIE: That seems to bother you more than the fact that you're going to die.

D-CLASS: I kept going because I told myself: it'll all make sense in the end! Sooner or later, if I live long enough, I'll meet someone who can see the big picture and explain what it all means.

NEWBIE: Are you religious?

D-CLASS: No.

NEWBIE: Yes, you are. No, no, you are. It takes faith to believe in meaning after all you've seen. Enough faith to found a dozen churches.

D-CLASS: Fat lot of good it's done me.

NEWBIE: It's kept you alive.

D-CLASS: For all that's worth..

NEWBIE: And not just alive. You cared about something. Something bigger than yourself.

D-CLASS: I used to wonder why the D-Class were all death row convicts, or lifers. First, I thought: it's because nobody will miss us. Then I thought: it's so the researchers don't feel bad about sending us into dangerous situations. And then I started thinking maybe it was the Foundation's way of giving us a second chance. A chance of redemption. [*Pause*] But it's the first one, isn't it? The Foundation doesn't give a shit about us and our souls and our pointless little lives. Not mine, and not yours. Secure, contain, protect, and everything else can go to hell.

NEWBIE: It's better that way.

D-CLASS: Easy for you to say.

NEWBIE: No, it's not! I had the same choice as you in being here.

D-CLASS: Some choice. This, or a lethal injection. What kind of choice is that?

NEWBIE: Is that what they told you? They told me: either you join us, work for us, or we

keep you locked up for the rest of your life. And I wanted to know more. I wanted to understand. I wanted it to make sense.

Of course, the more I found out, the less any of it made sense. But by then it was too late. Even if they could have wiped my mind, I wouldn't have let them. I couldn't stand the thought of not knowing. Even though knowing was driving me crazy.

[*Pause*]

I hated it so much at first. So much lying. So many awful sacrifices. I couldn't stand being part of it, and yet I had no choice. Once I knew what was going on, I *was* part of it, whether I did anything about it or not. So I kept going. I didn't let myself stop. There were so many others who weren't bothered the way I was, who didn't try the way I did, and I – I stopped them, when I could, held them back. Kept them from doing things that weren't necessary. I'm only one person, and the Foundation is huge, but I did what I could.

[*Pause*]

But it's not about me. It can't be about me, do you see? It can't be about my conscience, my soul, whatever I feel. Because I am only one person, and the Foundation's goal is... unimaginably vast. It took me years to understand the scope of what we do. It's important. It matters. It matters more than me, more than you. If I need to do things that I don't feel good about to make sure that tomorrow gravity still holds objects to the earth and time still flows forwards... wouldn't it be petty of me to say 'I can't do that, because my morals forbid it'? As if my being able to sleep at night is more important than the fate of the world?

Well, I think so. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's what I think. And that's what the Foundation thinks, too. So if I ever falter, somebody else will take my place. In the mean time, I can be as moral as I like, but the job still needs to be done. Secure. Contain. Protect. That's what the Foundation does. That's what the Foundation's for. Anything else is up to us.

Pause.

D-CLASS: I didn't have a good life. Not a happy life. Not a... moral life. But I helped save the world a few times. That's got to count for something. Right?

NEWBIE: Who's counting?

D-CLASS: Eh?

NEWBIE: Is anyone else doing the counting? Or is it just you?

D-CLASS: [*hesitates*] I don't want it to be just me. I mean, fuck. What do I know? What do I know about what a life is worth?

NEWBIE: I say it counts.

Pause.

D-CLASS: Thank you. [*Pause*] What do I need to do?

NEWBIE: [*pointing*] Walk along that path. Follow the lights. And whatever you do, don't look back.

4

Overseer, sitting behind his desk (set up as in the earlier scene with him and Ethics), turns to address the audience.

OVERSEER: I should clear up a common misunderstanding about the Foundation. We secure and contain the objects in our care. We do not destroy them, unless that is the only way to keep them contained. We do not release them, either. At least, not deliberately. We keep them, sometimes at great expense, and with great difficulty. We keep them because we hope to understand them one day. At that point, they will no longer be "anomalous" and we can allow the public to know about them. Until then, we keep them locked away and hidden so that they cannot disturb the consensus on which human civilisation is based.

I used to be in charge of induction of researchers for Site 19. When a new recruit wondered why we don't destroy the anomalies, or why we're so cautious and limited in the way that we make use of them, I would tell them a story. I would tell them of the early days of the Foundation, when the rules had not yet been laid down. I would tell them of a young researcher whose son had an astonishing gift of healing, so astonishing that the boy ought, by all of our current standards, have been given an SCP designation and kept contained.

But the rules were different then.

And his second child, a girl. Stillborn.

I would tell them of his grief and his rage and his certainty that he knew how to undo what fate had done to his family. I would tell them how he used his son's gifts, combined with several anomalous objects that he had been studying, to bring his daughter back to life. And then I would bring them to the padded cell where SCP-321 was held. Kept alive by an artificial heart. Growing more gigantic with each passing year and yet never becoming any older.

I would make sure they had a chance to hear her cries.

Once they had been led out of the containment chamber, I would tell them of the medical advances we had managed to spread to the outside world thanks to her unique cells, but by then they had usually got the point. Which is: Anomalies are unpredictable,

both in good and bad ways. If you try to exploit them, sometimes they don't give you the result you hope for. And sometimes they do, and it turns out to be a nightmare.

[*He takes the crumpled pieces of paper from his pocket, uncrumples them and holds them together to read them, then looks up.*]

We would have named her Emily.

5

Ethics sits, perusing a file thoughtfully. Newbie is led in by a guard, her wrists handcuffed. The guard leaves.

ETHICS: Sit down.

Newbie sits.

ETHICS: Do you know why you're here?

NEWBIE: This is about Edwards, isn't it?

ETHICS: Edwards being the agent you shot.

NEWBIE: I stand by my actions. If this were a court of law, I would be exonerated.

ETHICS: You're not on trial.

NEWBIE: Am I going to be demoted?

ETHICS: That remains to be seen.

NEWBIE: Edwards is the one who should be in trouble, not me.

ETHICS: Why do you say that?

NEWBIE: Do you know what his nickname is? 'Take No Prisoners'. He never uses a taser when he can use a gun. He never uses a gun when he can use a grenade. He was going to set fire to that school and leave all the people inside to burn, and for what? To prevent information getting out? They didn't see anything, and even if they did, it would have been enough to dose them with amnestics – selectively – and then plant a cover story in the local media. That's the protocol in cases like this.

ETHICS: There is a protocol for cases where amnestics combined with disinformation campaigns are considered likely to be ineffective by the leader of the task force cleaning up a containment breach. Were you aware of that?

Pause.

NEWBIE: Yes.

ETHICS: Do you know the name of this protocol?

NEWBIE: Protocol Brushfire.

ETHICS: And do you know what this protocol requires?

NEWBIE: Termination of all potential witnesses, using accidental fire as a cover story.

ETHICS: That doesn't change your mind?

NEWBIE: No.

ETHICS: Agent Edwards is claiming that the nature of the containment breach merited the application of Protocol Brushfire.

NEWBIE: Of course he is.

ETHICS: You disagree?

NEWBIE: Of course I do!

ETHICS: You could have killed him.

NEWBIE: I beg your pardon?

ETHICS: You had a clear line of sight. You're a good shot. He wasn't wearing body armour. You could have killed him. [*Pause*] Why didn't you?

NEWBIE: It wasn't – [*Pause*] I wouldn't – [*Pause*] It wasn't necessary.

ETHICS: You wanted to prevent him from setting the fire?

NEWBIE: Yes.

ETHICS: So you shot him in the leg, which disabled him temporarily, and halted the activation of Protocol Brushfire?

NEWBIE: Yes.

ETHICS: If you had killed him, we wouldn't be having this conversation. There were no witnesses. You could have told the internal investigators anything you liked.

NEWBIE: I don't like lies. I don't like killing and I don't like lies.

ETHICS: You are in a very unsuitable job for someone who dislikes lies and killing.

NEWBIE: Am I? I don't see it that way. Sometimes we have to lie or kill, but that's not what our mission is. If we took pleasure in the lying or the killing, we'd do it even when it wasn't necessary.

Ethics is impressed. Pause.

NEWBIE: You're not with the internal investigators.

ETHICS: No.

NEWBIE: Am I allowed to know who you are?

ETHICS: I'm with the Ethics Committee.

NEWBIE: [*disappointed, unimpressed*] Oh.

ETHICS: That's what most people say. I suppose it's not surprising. We do cultivate a

certain reputation. You've probably heard that all we ever do is rubber-stamp proposals from the O5 Council. Am I right?

NEWBIE: How many members of the Ethics Committee does it take to change a lightbulb?

ETHICS: Don't be silly, the Ethics Committee can't change anything!

NEWBIE: You've heard that one before?

ETHICS: I've heard them all before.

NEWBIE: I'm not surprised. The existence of the Ethics Committee is one big joke. Nobody takes you seriously. Every so often you swan in and ask some questions and then you swan out again and nothing happens. You're just there to make the O5s look good.

ETHICS: Really. Well, I would say that if that were true, we're doing rather a piss-poor job of it, aren't we?

NEWBIE: [*uncertain*] Uh. I didn't mean –

ETHICS: Yes, you did. You always mean what you say. It's one of the major reasons why you're here. How much do you know about the D-Class personnel?

NEWBIE: What? What does that have to do with –

ETHICS: Answer the question.

NEWBIE: They're taken from prisons. Sometimes homeless shelters or drug clinics, but mostly prisons. That's why most of them are men. There are rules on what a researcher can do to them, but they're pretty broad. If we need to poke something with a stick and we think that if we poke it, it might explode, we give the stick to a D-Class. Oh, and you need special permission to keep D-Class personnel attached to a project for more than 30 days, because every 30 days they get executed. Sorry, "terminated".

ETHICS: Unless the researcher requests that they be re-assigned.

NEWBIE: Well, yeah.

ETHICS: Which is what happens 92 per cent of the time. 7.9 per cent of D-Class are killed in containment-related incidents before 30 days have passed. The other 0.1 per cent… those are the interesting ones.

NEWBIE: Wait. Wait a minute. You're telling me – you're telling me routine termination happens one-tenth of a percent of the time?

ETHICS: Oh, yes. And whenever a researcher assigns D-Class personnel to routine termination, a red flag is placed on his or file. Two red flags means demotion.

NEWBIE: What, from level 4 clearance to level 3?

ETHICS: From A-Class personnel to D-Class. That was one of my suggestions. D-Class personnel used to last about ten days, on average. Now they last about six months. Most researchers prefer to sign the form that says "re-assign" rather than the form that says "terminate". The ones who don't, well… the Foundation can still use them, though not as researchers. Not in any position where they have power over others. There is a place for everyone in the Foundation. Even murderers.

Pause. Newbie is stunned into silence.

Will I show you the tools of my trade? [*Takes out two rubber stamps and pushes them over the table towards Newbie.*] Just as the rumour has it. Rubber stamps. You see what they say?

NEWBIE: This one says 'approved'.

ETHICS: And the other one?

NEWBIE: 'Denied'.

ETHICS: The rumour that we have no power is very close to the truth. We have two powers, and two alone. We can approve a proposal by the O5 Council, or we can deny approval.

NEWBIE: What happens if you deny it?

ETHICS: It doesn't go through. If the Ethics Committee says no, the O5 Council must listen. If we say 'this will not be done', it is not done. [*Beat*] I am sure that some of the rumours about our craven ineffectiveness were started by the O5 Council. Some of them resent the small measure of restraint we force them to exercise.

NEWBIE: What does this have to do with me?

ETHICS: I need to retire soon, for medical reasons. There must be thirteen on the Ethics Committee, as there are thirteen on the O5 Council. I have been searching for a successor. It's going to be you.

NEWBIE: You – what?

ETHICS: I've acquired your file, every record the Foundation has kept on your behaviour. The Ethics Committee needs you. And you need the Ethics Committee. [*Pause*] Don't

you?

NEWBIE: Approve or deny. Nothing else?

ETHICS: More would be too much.

NEWBIE: Yes. Yes, it would. [*Pause. Nodding*] Okay. Okay.

ETHICS: Good. [*Standing*] Your secondment to the Ethics Committee will be framed as a demotion. It is not. You have clearance equivalent to Level 5 from now on. We are the Foundation's memory as well as its conscience.

As she leaves, C looks up and speaks. A stops to listen.

NEWBIE: You remember everything?

ETHICS: Everything.

NEWBIE: I'm so sorry.

Pause.

ETHICS: You'll do well.

6

Newbie alone on stage.

NEWBIE: The first thing I did, once the transfer had gone through, was read the full, uncensored version of the file on Procedure 110-Montauk. The second thing I did was throw up. They had a bucket ready, just in case. Apparently that happens a lot.

All the things I've seen and done...

None of it could match that.

Still. There is an open gate that leads to Hell. On the threshold of that gate, there is a vicious dog that savages any demons that threaten to come across into Earth. The dog likes the taste of human flesh, and sometimes a human strays too close and is devoured.

Once, I was the dog. Now, I am the one who holds the dog's leash. If we could close the gate we would. If we could tame the dog without leaving the Earth vulnerable to demons, we would. For now, all we can do is hold tight to the dog's leash.

Pause.

I sleep well now. Better than before. [*Beat*] I don't know how long that'll last. But after all, it's not about me. It's never been about me.

CURTAIN

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In addition to using the general concepts of the SCP Foundation universe, the play adapts material from the following wiki articles (listed in order of appearance in the play):

- SCP-1425 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-1425), "Star Signals", by Silberescher;
- SCP-701 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-701), "The Hanged King's Tragedy" by tinwatchman;
- SCP-352 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-352), "Baba Yaga", by DrGears;
- SCP-321 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-321), "Child of Man", by DrBright;
- SCP-092 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-092), "The Best of the 5th Dimension!", by Bijhan, revised by Voct;
- SCP-405 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-405), "Telepathy Virus", by Foweraker;
- SCP-020 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-020), "Unseen Mold", by AFatGhost;
- SCP-871 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-871), "Self-Replicating Cake", by Seibai;
- SCP-458 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-458), "The Never-Ending Pizza Box", by Pahlinuk;
- SCP-231 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-231), "Special Personnel Requirements", by DrBright;
- SCP-1616 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-1616), "Nibbles", author unknown;
- SCP-450 (http://www.scp-wiki.net/scp-450), "Abandoned Federal Penitentiary", by DrClef;
- "Ethics Committee Orientation" (http://www.scp-wiki.net/ethics-committee-orientation), by Voct.

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